

Date: February 19, 2015

Testimony of Walter Mann

Re: Proposed Bill No. 5555

Introduced by:

REP. YACCARINO, 87th Dist.

***AN ACT CONCERNING THE PUBLIC, EDUCATIONAL AND GOVERNMENTAL
PROGRAMMING AND EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY INVESTMENT ACCOUNT
(PEGPETIA) GRANT PROGRAM.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

That the general statutes be amended to reinstate the public, educational and governmental programming and educational technology investment account grant program.

Statement of Purpose:

To reinstate the PEGPETIA Grant.

Honorable Members of the Energy & Technology Committee,

My name is Walter Mann, I am Executive Director of North Haven Community TV (NHTV), Station Manager of Branford Community TV (BCTV), and Station Manager of North Branford Public Cable Access Group, Inc. (Totoket TV). I have been involved in the P.E.G. Community Access field since 1985, as well as serving as General Manager of WCTX-TV/New Haven (known as MYTV-9) from 1995 through 2002. I also have had extensive experience in the commercial radio broadcast industry prior to 1995. I am writing you today to support Proposed House Bill No. 5555, which seeks to reinstate the Public, Educational and Governmental Programming and Educational Technology Investment Account (commonly known as PEGPETIA).

The PEGPETIA program was established and is in Section 33 of Public Act 07-253, An Act Concerning Certified Competitive Video Services, now codified as § 16-331cc of the General Statutes of Connecticut which created the public, educational and governmental programming and education technology investment account. The public, educational and governmental programming and education technology investment account is a separate, non-lapsing account within the State of Connecticut general fund. This fund was started utilizing proceeds of a small tax on cable and satellite TV subscribers created SPECIFICALLY for use in PEGPETIA.

However, in 2014, \$6.9 million dollars was swept out of the statewide PEGPETIA fund that was meant to ensure that libraries, P.E.G. community media centers and schools could keep pace with technological change. This was done to help mitigate the budget deficit experienced by the State of Connecticut. This has caused those entities to not be able to apply for grant from this fund to maintain effective technology. Now, Proposed Bill No. 5555 will reinstate the PEGPETIA Fund.

I ask each and every one of the members of the Energy & Technology Committee to specifically realize the critical importance of P.E.G. community access TV centers. All of you I am sure are very familiar with the excellent work that CT-N, The Connecticut Network does, in televising the goings-on here at the Capitol. CT-N brings State government into your constituents' homes. But, remember, CT-N was developed based on the successful formula that LOCAL government access channels have performed for decades, providing televised coverage of LOCAL government meetings, programs hosted by LOCAL elected officials, as well as LOCAL debates and LIVE, LOCAL election coverage. This service is critical to seniors, shut-ins, as well as the general working population who, in today's fast-paced lifestyle, have difficulty finding time to actually attend these meetings in person. But, they can (and do) rely on LOCAL government access TV to keep them informed. As well, P.E.G. access stations provide a "hyper-local" content delivery service of happenings in local communities. In fact, many of you may have been on LOCAL P.E.G. access TV programs when you first ran for elected office, or sought re-election. LOCAL P.E.G. access TV is a tremendous resource to reach constituents, and provide vital information. Even in the case of natural weather emergencies, LOCAL P.E.G. access TV has helped relay critical information to LOCAL residents.

In this day and age of continued media consolidation, once vibrant, local radio stations have been reduced to almost fully-automated stations, with very little local staff or announcers, and less local coverage. The consolidation of the media industry is now starting to affect commercial broadcast TV, who, with rare exceptions, predominantly focus on "if it bleeds, it leads" TV news coverage. Gone from most commercial broadcast TV and radio stations are local public affairs programs, as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Federal regulations have

loosened once-stringent public service programming and ownership rules. I ask the members of the Energy & Technology Committee to realize that LOCAL P.E.G. access TV is one of the last media entities that still provide HYPER-LOCAL content. LOCAL P.E.G. access TV is fighting for survival, with numerous P.E.G. access TV stations shutting down across the country due to changing governmental regulations that clearly favor large media conglomerates. In fact, Rep. Fred Upton (R-Michigan) and Rep. Greg Walden (R-Oregon) are spearheading the revision of the Communications Act of 1996. Among the questions they are asking is whether P.E.G. access TV should continue to be required in light of the emergence of the internet. My answer is that until ESPN, CNN, FOX News, and local stations such as WTNH, WFSB, WVIT, WTIC, etc., agree to have their signals dropped from cable TV and IPTV systems, we will continue to insist our signals continue to be carried by cable TV and IPTV systems. It is interesting to point out that, according to the Washington-based non-profit Center for Responsive Politics, which compiles campaign data, Rep. Upton campaign donations from some of the largest cable MSO's (operators) in the country. The same holds true for Rep. Walden.

In closing, I ask this Committee to help support and preserve the tremendous services provided by the P.E.G. access TV stations throughout Connecticut, and to remember that those services are well liked by your constituents. YOU have the power to continue to support P.E.G. access TV by reinstating the PEGPETIA program. Remember, like CT-N, local P.E.G. access TV stations are vital to the communities they serve. Without your support of P.E.G. access TV, you are ultimately letting down the very people who elected you into office.

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